

Message Text

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PAGE 01 BANGKO 17326 191134Z

53

ACTION EA-09

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FM AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9962

AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

C O N F I D E N T I A L BANGKOK 17326

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, TH, UR

SUBJ: THAI/SOVIET RELATIONS

REF: BANGKOK 8746

1. OVER THE PAST FOUR MONTHS THERE HAVE BEEN A SERIES OF PUBLIC AND PRIVATE ANNOUNCEMENTS GIVING THE IMPRESSION OF FORWARD MOVEMENT IN THAI-SOVIET RELATIONS.

2. FOLLOWING ON THE HEELS ON THE CONVERSATION REPORTED IN PARA 5 REFTEL, ON JUNE 26, MFA POLICY AND PLANNING DIVISION OFFICIAL SAWANIT KHONGSIRI STATED THAT THE CULTURAL AGREEMENT WAS PRACTICALLY READY FOR SIGNATURE. THROUGHOUT THE SUMMER, CULTURAL EXCHANGES HAVE BEEN PERIODICALLY ANNOUNCED IN THE PRESS, INCLUDING EXPENSE-PAID TRIPS TO THE USSR FOR THAI PARLIAMENTARIANS AND FILM MAKERS AND AN EXCHANGE OF FOOTBALL AND PINGPONG TEAMS. AT THE SWISS NATIONAL DAY RECEPTION ON AUGUST 1, THE DCM OBSERVED PRACHA GUNA-KASEM, OUT-GOING DIRECTOR GENERAL OF THE MFA INFORMATION DEPARTMENT, HAD A BULKY ENVELOPE TO THE SOVIET AMBASSADOR WITH THE REMARK, "THIS IS APPROVED FROM OUR SIDE". THE DCM PRESUMED THAT THIS REFERRED TO THE CULTURAL AGREEMENT. THERE HAS BEEN NO FURTHER ANNOUNCEMENT IN THE PRESS ON THE SUBJECT TO DATE

CONFIDENTIAL

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PAGE 02 BANGKO 17326 191134Z

BUT WE ANTICIPATE THAT ONE WILL NOT BE LONG IN COMING.

3. WITH REGARD TO THE ASSIGNMENT OF A SOVIET MILITARY ATTACHE TO BANGKOK, CHATCHAI DENIED ANY KNOWLEDGE OF SUCH A SOVIET REQUEST DURING HIS JULY 31 PRESS CONFERENCE. BUT THE BANGKOK POST OF AUGUST 5 REPORTED IN-COMING DIRECTOR GENERAL OF THE MFA INFORMATION DEPARTMENT, NITSAI WETCHACHIWA, AS STATING THAT THE REQUEST FOR A MILITARY ATTACHE HAD BEEN RECEIVED FROM THE SOVIET EMBASSY AND HAD BEEN FORWARDED TO THE MINISTRY OF DEFENSE FOR A DECISION. NITSAI NOTED THAT THE POSITION OF THAT MINISTRY WOULD BE DECISIVE. IN THE SAME INTERVIEW NITSAI DENIED ANY KNOWLEDGE OF A PRESS STORY THAT THE MOSCOW PEOPLES' BANK HAD REQUESTED APPROVAL OF THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A BRANCH IN BANGKOK. IN HIS JULY 31 PRESS CONFERENCE, CHATCHAI REFUSED COMMENT ON THE MOSCOW BANK QUESTION AND REMARKED THAT IT WOULD BE A MATTER FOR THE FINANCE MINISTRY.

4. FINALLY, ON THE MFA INTERNAL SIDE, PRESS DIVISION CHIEF, PHIRAT ITSARASENA ADVISED THE PAO ON JULY 30 THAT PM CHATCHAI HAD DIRECTED THE INFORMATION OF A "RUSSIAN SECTION" WITHIN THE MFA, STAFFED WITH SELECTED OFFICERS AND DESIGNED TO CULTIVATE CONTACTS WITH SOVIET OFFICIALS, WATCH THEIR ACTIVITIES AND SEE WHAT THEY WANT AND HOW THEY SEE THEIR PROSPECTS IN THAILAND. PHIRAT SAID THAT THE SOVIETS ARE, "PUSHING VERY HARD NOW, NOT ONLY ON THE CULTURAL EXCHANGE, BUT ACROSS THE BOARD". HE ADDED THAT THE MFA WAS AWARE THAT NO ONE WAS KEEPING TRACK OF SOVIET ACTIVITIES AND THAT CHATCHAI WANTED AN ORGANIZED EFFORT "TO HOLD THEM OFF WITHOUT SEEMING NEGATIVE".

5. COMMENT: FROM ALL OF THE FOREGOING WE CONCLUDE THAT SLOW PROGRESS IS OCCURRING IN THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A WIDER VARIETY OF THAI/USSR GOVERNMENTAL RELATIONSHIPS. GIVEN PHIRAT'S STATEMENTS AND THE IMPORTANCE WHICH THE RTG ATTACHES TO ITS NEW-FOUND RELATIONSHIP WITH THE PRC, WE DO NOT LOOK FOR ANY GREATLY ACKLERATED INTIMACY OR WIDENED SCOPE IN THESE RELATIONS IN THE NEAR FUTURE. NITSAI'S DEFERENCE TO THE DEFENSE MINISTRY REGARDING
CONFIDENTIAL
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PAGE 03 BANGKO 17326 191134Z

THE SOVIET MILITARY ATTACHE QUESTION APPEARS A PLOY TO FEND OFF THE SOVIETS WITHOUT BRUISING THEIR FEELINGS OVERMUCH. THE THAI MILITARY ESTABLISHMENT REMAINS OVERTLY SUSPICIOUS OF THE USSR, AND THE MFA CAN BLAME THE MINISTRY OF DEFENSE IN THE EVENT OF A NEGATIVE RTG DECISION. THIS WOULD BE CONSISTENT WITH CHATCHAI'S ALLEGED AIMS IN DEALING WITH THE USSR WITHOUT OFFENDING PEKING.
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